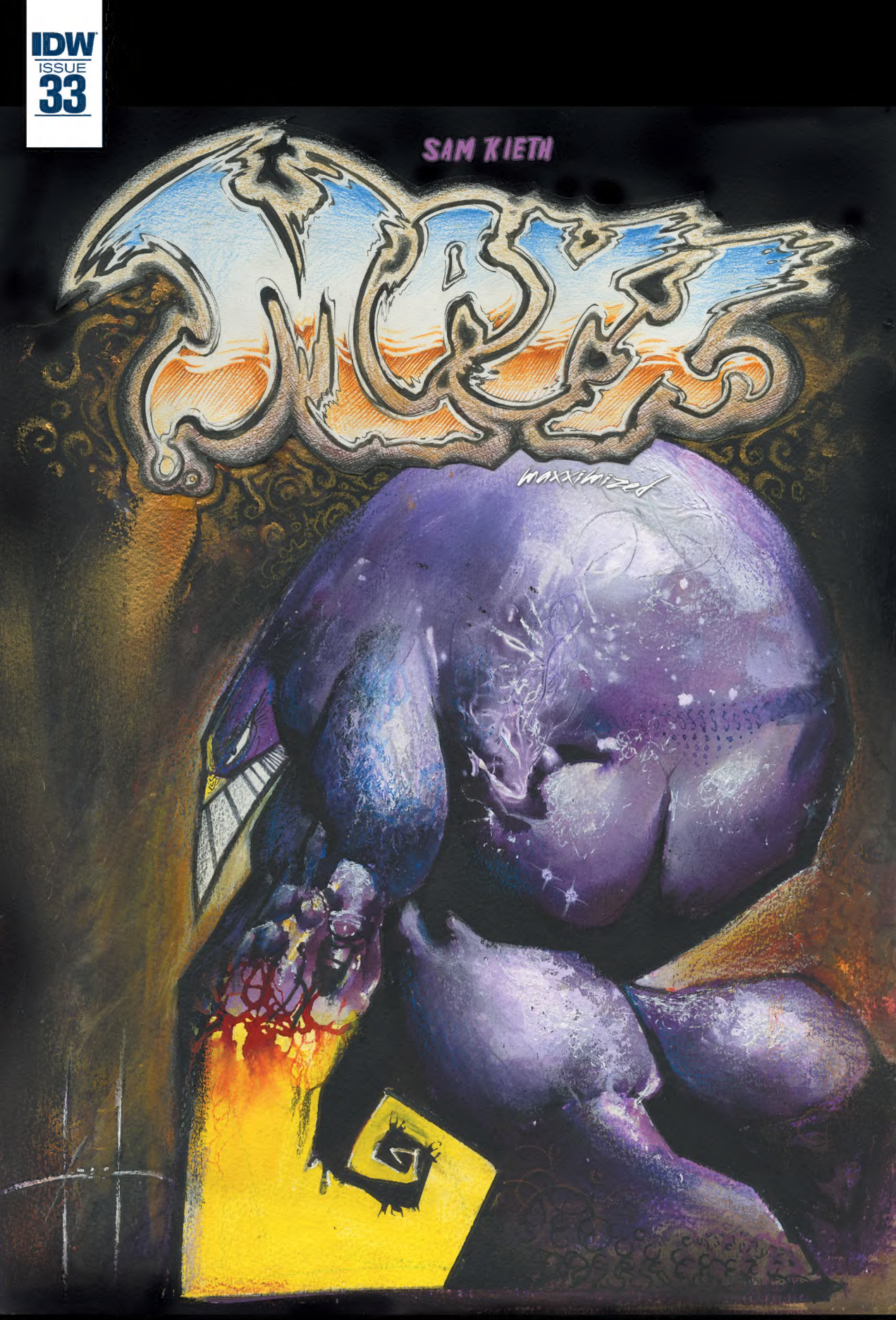
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SAM KIETH
THE MAXX
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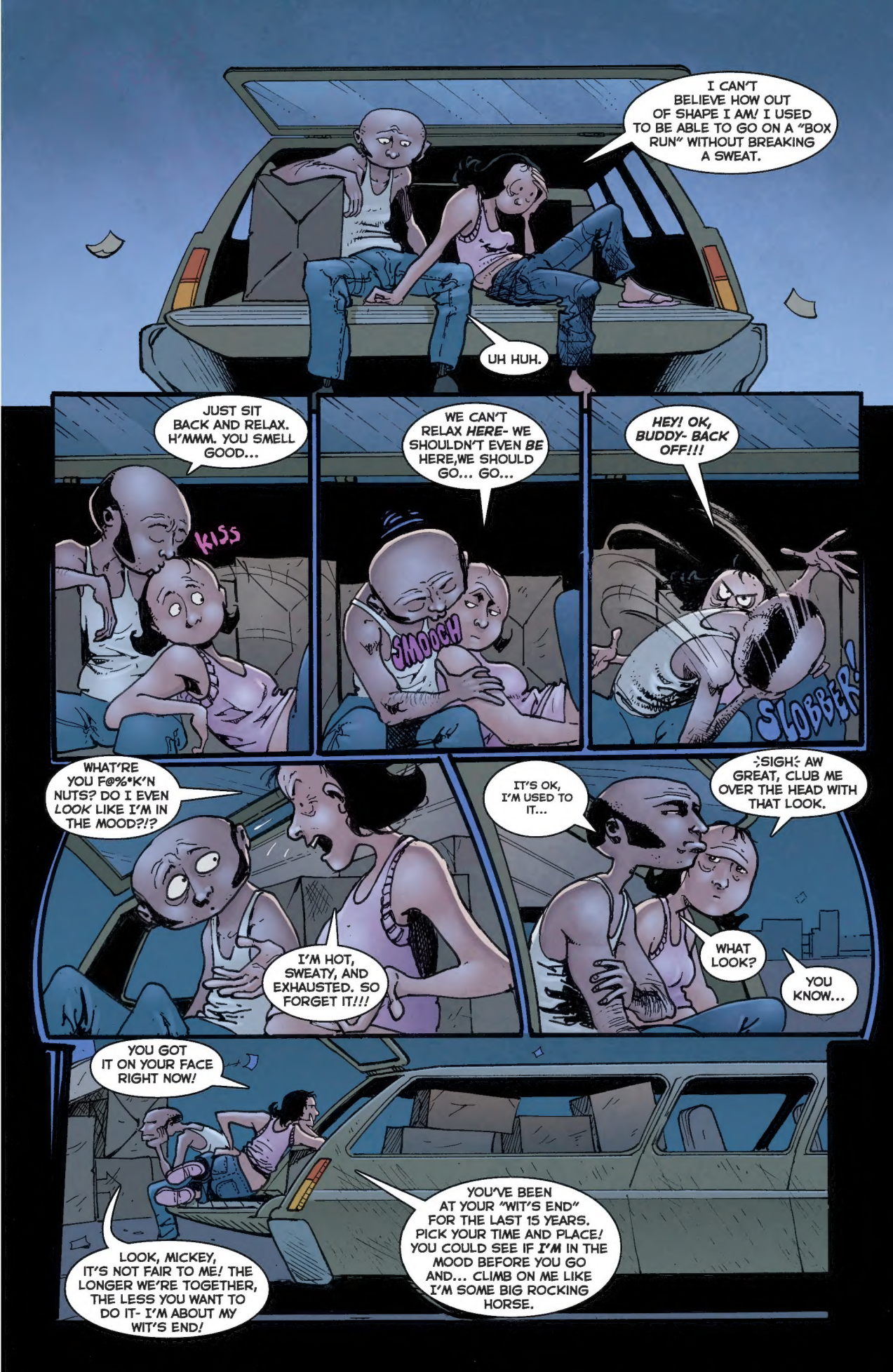
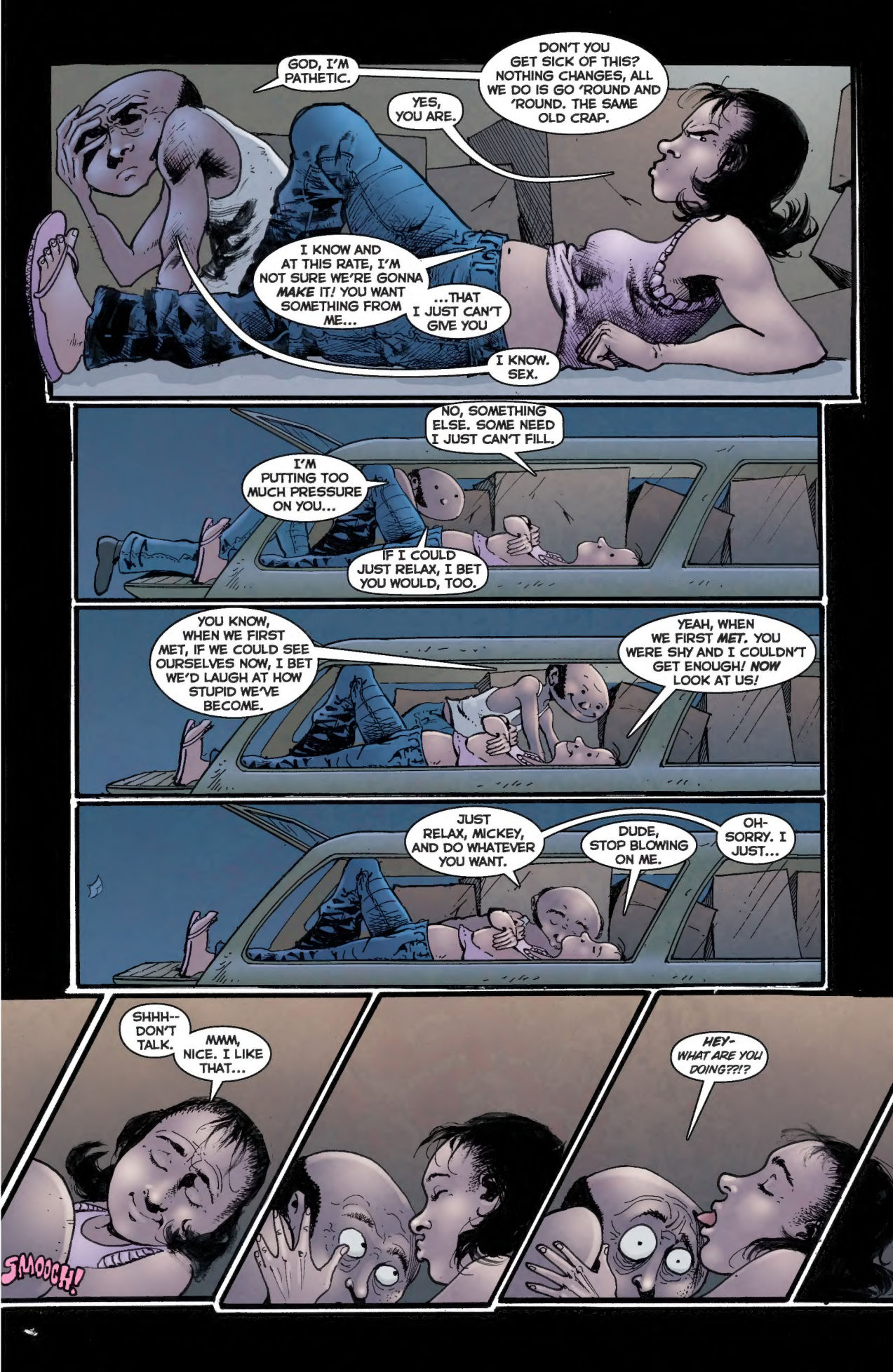
HI KIDS, MR. GONE HERE. HERE'S A STORY OF MICKEY, DUDE AND THE ONLY GUY WHO EVER SCARED THE HELL OUT OF *ME*. HE'S CALLED... WELL YOU'LL MEET HIM SOON ENOUGH.
REMEMBER, IN MAXX 32, WHEN GLORIE OPENED AN URN OUTSIDE SARA'S BATHROOM, WHICH CAUSED THE WORLD TO END?
THIS STORY TAKES PLACE THREE DAYS BEFORE THAT.
MUSIC CUE: DVORAK'S NEW WORLD SYMPH., 2ND MVMT.
COUNTING BACKWARDS THEN...
... THIS IS THE THIRD DAY BEFORE...
... THE END OF THE WORLD.
MELODRAMATIC, HUH?
THOUGHT YOU'D LIKE IT.

THIS PLACE GIVES ME THE CREEPS. C'MON, DUDE, WE'VE GOT ENOUGH. THE CAR'S FULL- LET'S GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE WE'RE CAUGHT!
I KNOW. JUST ONE MORE... BESIDES, STEALING BOXES FROM BEHIND GROCERY STORES IS A TRADITION. THEY EXPECT IT.
SURE, SURE- BUT THIS IS A CRAPPY PART OF TOWN, AND I DON'T FEEL SAFE HERE.
WE'RE NOT. THAT'S WHAT MAKES IT *FUN.* DANGER. SUSPENSE. ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN.
ALL THAT'S *HAPPENED* SO FAR IS WE'VE BUSTED OUR ASSES MOVING, AND I'M SWEATY AND POOPED!
:SIGH:
GUESS YOU'RE RIGHT, THOUGH. MAYBE I'LL SIT DOWN- JUST FOR A SEC.


I CAN'T BELIEVE HOW OUT OF SHAPE I AM! I USED TO BE ABLE TO GO ON A "BOX RUN" WITHOUT BREAKING A SWEAT.
UH HUH.
JUST SIT BACK AND RELAX. H'MMM. YOU SMELL GOOD...
KISS
WE CAN'T RELAX *HERE*- WE SHOULDN'T EVEN *BE* HERE,WE SHOULD GO... GO...
SMOOCH
HEY! OK, BUDDY- BACK OFF!!!
SLOBBER!
WHAT'RE YOU F@%*K'N NUTS? DO I EVEN *LOOK* LIKE I'M IN THE MOOD?!?
I'M HOT, SWEATY, AND EXHAUSTED. SO FORGET IT!!!
IT'S OK, I'M USED TO IT...
:SIGH: AW GREAT, CLUB ME OVER THE HEAD WITH THAT LOOK.
WHAT LOOK?
YOU KNOW...
YOU GOT IT ON YOUR FACE RIGHT NOW!
LOOK, MICKEY, IT'S NOT FAIR TO ME! THE LONGER WE'RE TOGETHER, THE LESS YOU WANT TO DO IT- I'M ABOUT MY WIT'S END!
YOU'VE BEEN AT YOUR "WIT'S END" FOR THE LAST 15 YEARS. PICK YOUR TIME AND PLACE! YOU COULD SEE IF *I'M* IN THE MOOD BEFORE YOU GO AND... CLIMB ON ME LIKE I'M SOME BIG ROCKING HORSE.

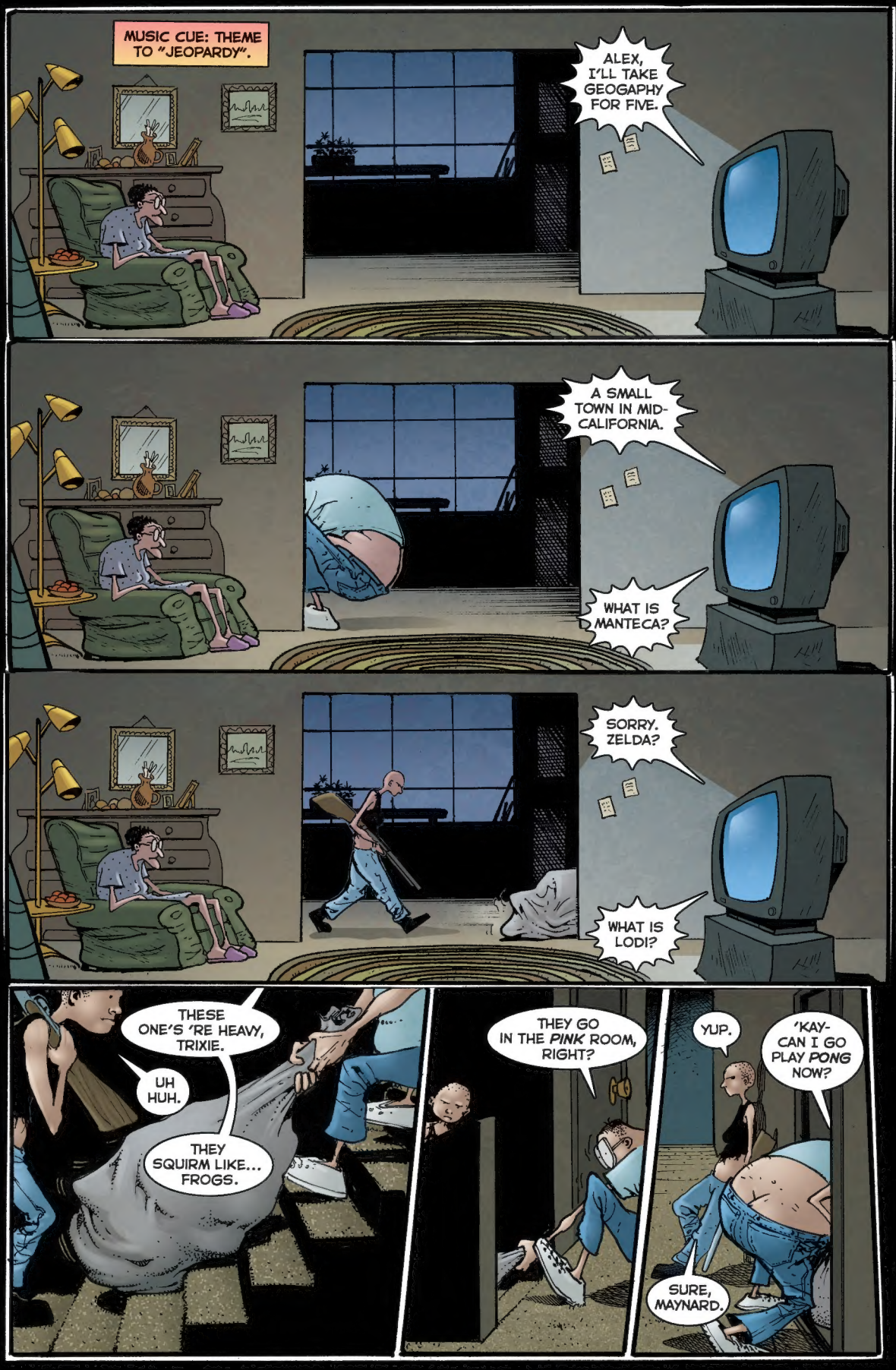
OK. LET'S JUST GO THEN. SCREW IT!!!
WAIT- NOT LIKE THIS. LET'S NOT LEAVE MAD! BUT IT'S NOT MY FAULT. YOU HAVE TO SEE THINGS FROM MY SIDE, TOO.
WHO LOOKS OUT FOR MY SIDE WHILE I COME OVER TO YOURS?
THERE- HAVE WE MADE UP YET?
NO. I CAN'T EVEN REMEMBER THE LAST TIME WE "MADE UP".
YOU'RE RIGHT, I'M A BITCH. YOU SHOULD LEAVE ME...
I KNOW I SHOULD INITIATE THINGS MORE, IT'S JUST...
I KNOW, YOU NEED SOME HELP!!!
OK, JUST STOP AND LISTEN FOR A SEC.
DUDE, HONEY- YOU KNOW YOU DON'T WANT ME TO- IF I'M NOT INTO IT, RIGHT?
RIGHT?
OK, IF THAT'S WHAT YOU WANT...
GO AHEAD- CLIMB ON!!! TAKE ME RIGHT HERE!!! I'LL JUST LAY HERE, AND TRY NOT TO GET IN THE WAY.
WHUMP!
THAT'S OK. I GET IT. KNOCK IT OFF.
OOPS. DID WIFEY "SPOIL THE MOOD" WITH HER NASTY WANTS?


GOD, I'M PATHETIC.
DON'T YOU GET SICK OF THIS? NOTHING CHANGES, ALL WE DO IS GO 'ROUND AND 'ROUND. THE SAME OLD CRAP.
YES, YOU ARE.
I KNOW AND AT THIS RATE, I'M NOT SURE WE'RE GONNA *MAKE* IT! YOU WANT SOMETHING FROM ME...
...THAT I JUST CAN'T GIVE YOU
I KNOW. SEX.
NO, SOMETHING ELSE. SOME NEED I JUST CAN'T FILL.
I'M PUTTING TOO MUCH PRESSURE ON YOU...
IF I COULD JUST RELAX, I BET YOU WOULD, TOO.
YOU KNOW, WHEN WE FIRST MET, IF WE COULD SEE OURSELVES NOW, I BET WE'D LAUGH AT HOW STUPID WE'VE BECOME.
YEAH, WHEN WE FIRST *MET.* YOU WERE SHY AND I COULDN'T GET ENOUGH! *NOW* LOOK AT US!
JUST RELAX, MICKEY, AND DO WHATEVER YOU WANT.
DUDE, STOP BLOWING ON ME.
OH- SORRY. I JUST...
SHHH-- DON'T TALK.
MMM, NICE. I LIKE THAT...
SMOOCH!
HEY- WHAT ARE YOU DOING??!?

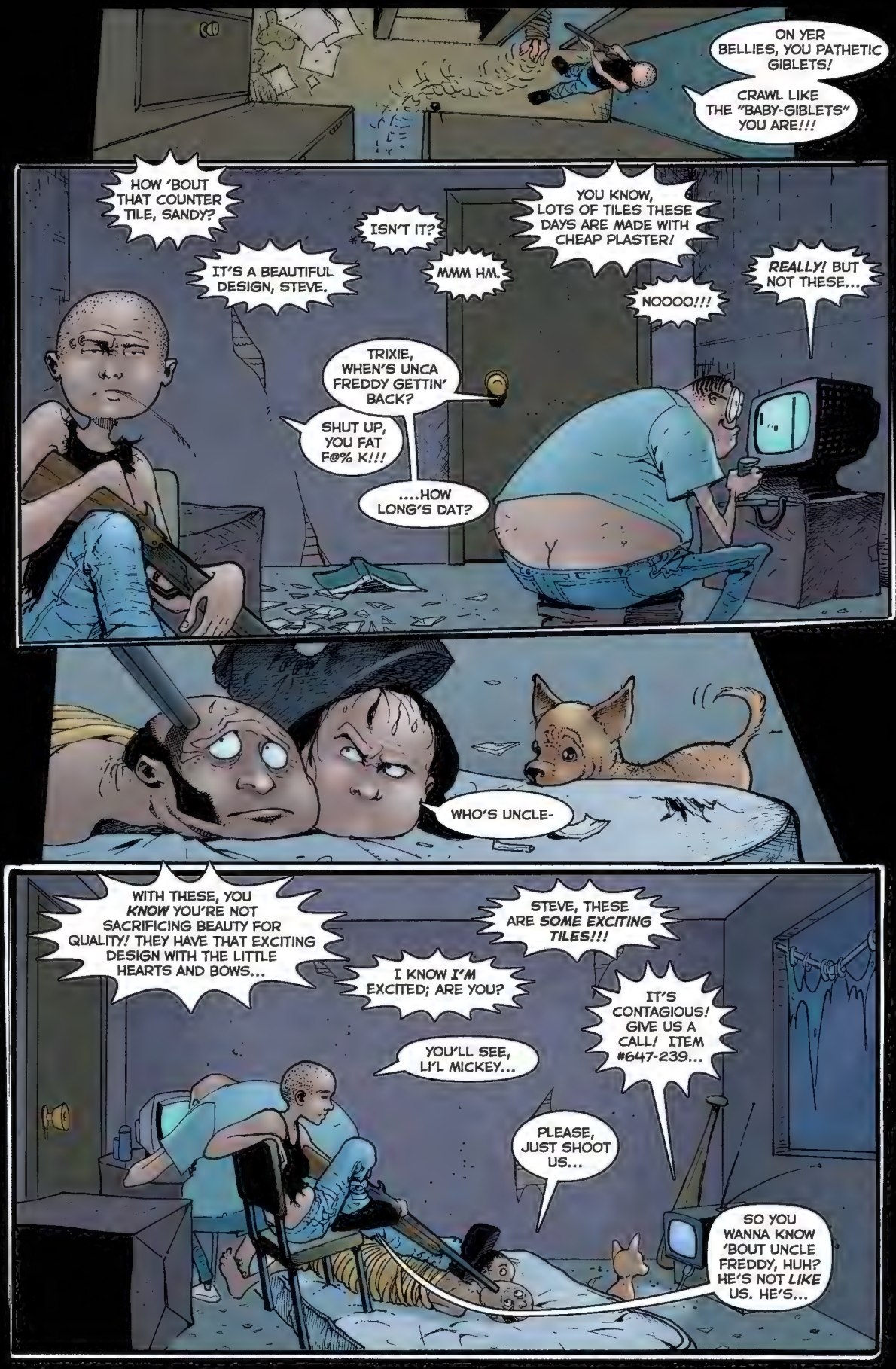
WHAT WAS THAT!?!
OK, OK, I'M SORRY. I DIDN'T THINK...
WELL, OBVIOUSLY NOT. NOW COULD YOU JUST...
... JUST...
... LIE BACK AND...
SURE.
C'MON, DON'T BE PISSED...
TELL ME YOU'RE NOT ANGRY.
I'M NOT ANGRY.
THANKS.
SURE.
I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU'RE GONNA DO THIS, WHEN YOU KNOW...
SMACK
WHAT WAS THAT?
WHAT?
I HEARD SOMETHING. A CAR.
PROB'LY JUST SOME KIDS... CRUISIN'.
THEN WHY ARE THEY COMING TOWARD US?
I DUNNO, BUT LET'S GO. RIGHT NOW!
C'MON MICKEY- GET INSIDE! FORGET THE HATCH!
VROOOMM
SLAM!

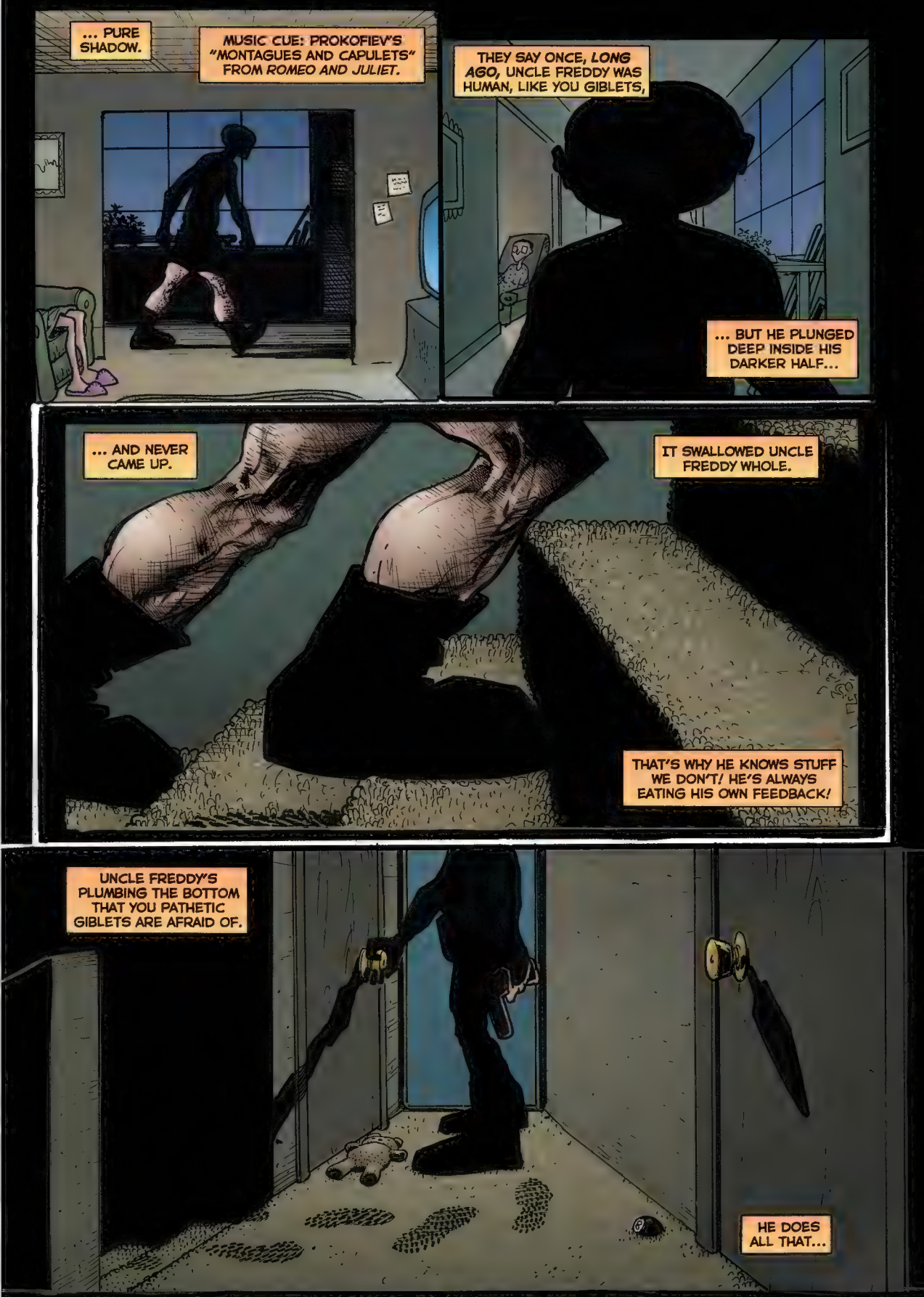
THEY STOPPED, BUT THEIR ENGINE'S STILL RUNNING. DUDE, WHAT'RE THEY DOING?
F@#*K'N WITH US! C'MON, DAMMIT! DON'T STALL NOW!!
OH MY GOD, DUDE-
- THEY'RE COMING.
HURRY!!! HURRY!!!
I AM!!! F@#*K'N THING MUST BE FLOODED!
GOD.
OH GOD.
OH GOD.
OH GOD.

THE LOVE FOR THREE ORANGES


MUSIC CUE: THEME TO "JEOPARDY".
ALEX, I'LL TAKE GEOGAPHY FOR FIVE.
A SMALL TOWN IN MID-CALIFORNIA.
WHAT IS MANTECA?
SORRY. ZELDA?
WHAT IS LODI?
THESE ONE'S 'RE HEAVY, TRIXIE.
UH HUH.
THEY SQUIRM LIKE... FROGS.
THEY GO IN THE *PINK* ROOM, RIGHT?
YUP.
'KAY- CAN I GO PLAY *PONG* NOW?
SURE, MAYNARD.

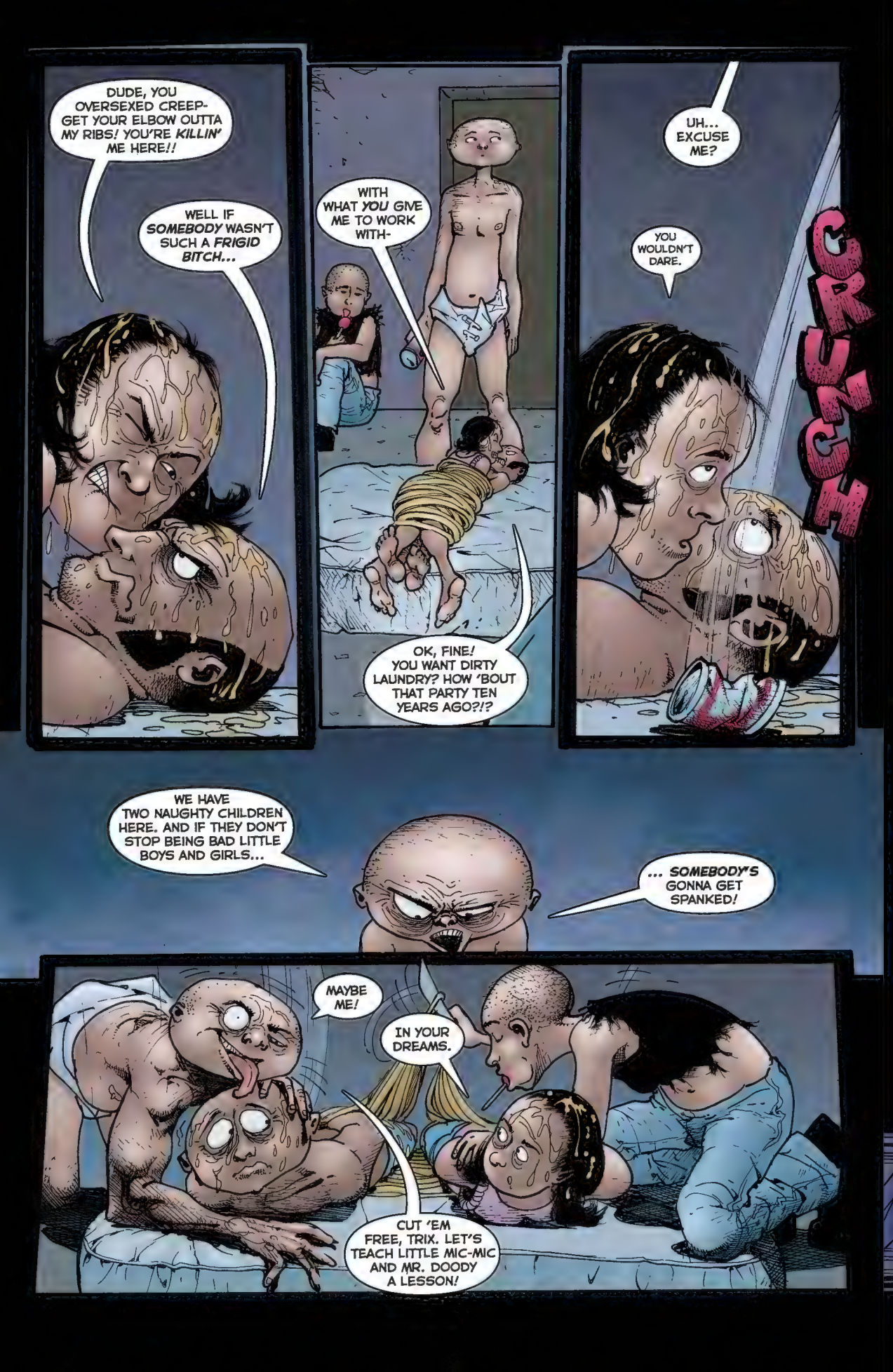
WHAT HAPPENED?
WILL YOU JUST-
SOMETHING HAPPENED!!!
SO WHAT?!? JUST STOP FREAKING OUT, OK???
HOW LONG HAVE WE BEEN HERE, ANYWAY? AND WHAT WAS ALL THAT STUFF IN THE CAR? WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU IN THE CAR?
DUDE DON'T EVEN START...
LISTEN, MICKEY, THIS MIGHT BE *IT* FOR US. I JUST WANNA SAY, ABOUT THAT NIGHT AT THE PARTY SO LONG AGO-
I DON'T WANNA TALK ABOUT IT.
ME NEITHER BUT-
THEN *DROP* IT!
BUT THIS MIGHT BE OUR LAST CHANCE-
I LOVE YOU, MICKEY. I DON'T WANT TO DIE!
IF YOU'D JUST CALM DOWN AND GIVE ME A CHANCE TO THINK MAYBE WE COULD-
I THINK THIS IS HOW IT'S GONNA END... IN THIS ROOM!
OH FOR GOD'S SAKE, WILL YOU JUST F¢#KN' SHUT-
OK, KIDS, IT'S ALMOST SHOW TIME. FOLLOW ME.

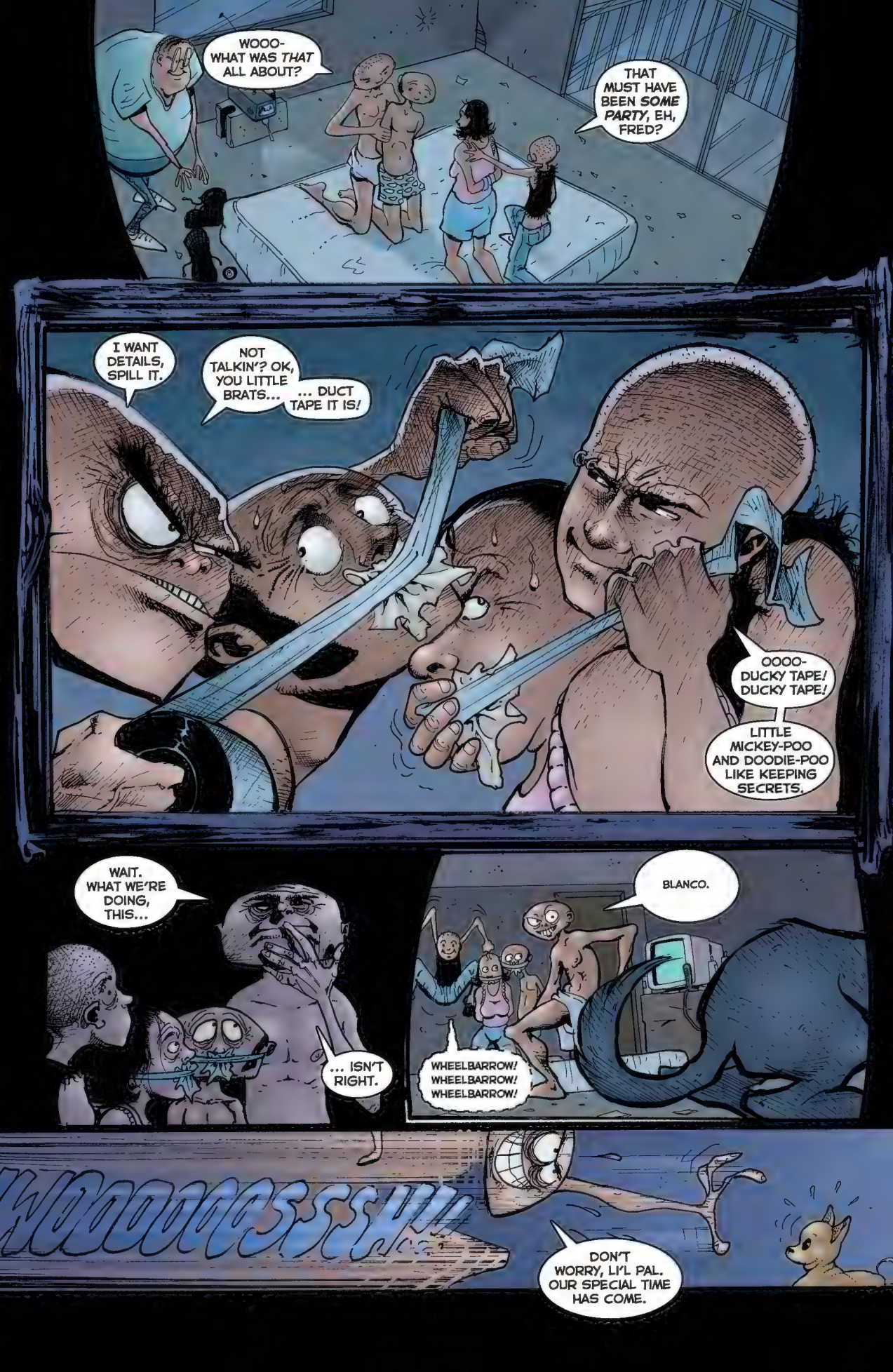

ON YER BELLIES, YOU PATHETIC GIBLETS!
CRAWL LIKE THE "BABY-GIBLETS" YOU ARE!!!
HOW 'BOUT THAT COUNTER TILE, SANDY?
IT'S A BEAUTIFUL DESIGN, STEVE.
ISN'T IT?
MMM HM.
YOU KNOW, LOTS OF TILES THESE DAYS ARE MADE WITH CHEAP PLASTER!
NOOOO!!!
REALLY! BUT NOT THESE...
TRIXIE, WHEN'S UNCA FREDDY GETTIN' BACK?
SHUT UP, YOU FAT F@% K!!!
....HOW LONG'S DAT?
WHO'S UNCLE-
WITH THESE, YOU KNOW YOU'RE NOT SACRIFICING BEAUTY FOR QUALITY! THEY HAVE THAT EXCITING DESIGN WITH THE LITTLE HEARTS AND BOWS...
STEVE, THESE ARE SOME EXCITING TILES!!!
I KNOW I'M EXCITED; ARE YOU?
YOU'LL SEE, LI'L MICKEY...
IT'S CONTAGIOUS! GIVE US A CALL! ITEM #647-239...
PLEASE, JUST SHOOT US...
SO YOU WANNA KNOW 'BOUT UNCLE FREDDY, HUH? HE'S NOT LIKE US. HE'S...


... PURE SHADOW.
MUSIC CUE: PROKOFIEV'S "MONTAGUES AND CAPULETS" FROM ROMEO AND JULIET.
THEY SAY ONCE, LONG AGO, UNCLE FREDDY WAS HUMAN, LIKE YOU GIBLETS,
... BUT HE PLUNGED DEEP INSIDE HIS DARKER HALF...
... AND NEVER CAME UP.
IT SWALLOWED UNCLE FREDDY WHOLE.
THAT'S WHY HE KNOWS STUFF WE DON'T! HE'S ALWAYS EATING HIS OWN FEEDBACK!
UNCLE FREDDY'S PLUMBING THE BOTTOM THAT YOU PATHETIC GIBLETS ARE AFRAID OF.
HE DOES ALL THAT...

... 'CAUSE HE LOVES YOU.
SSSQEEEEK
HEY KIDS, GUESS WHO'S HOME!
UNCLE FREDDIE
UNCA FREDDY! UNCA FREDDY!
HEY, MAYNARD.
UH OH- SOMEBODY LEFT A COURLA TOYS ON THE BED. YOU TWO SHOULD PICK UP AFTER YERSELVES.

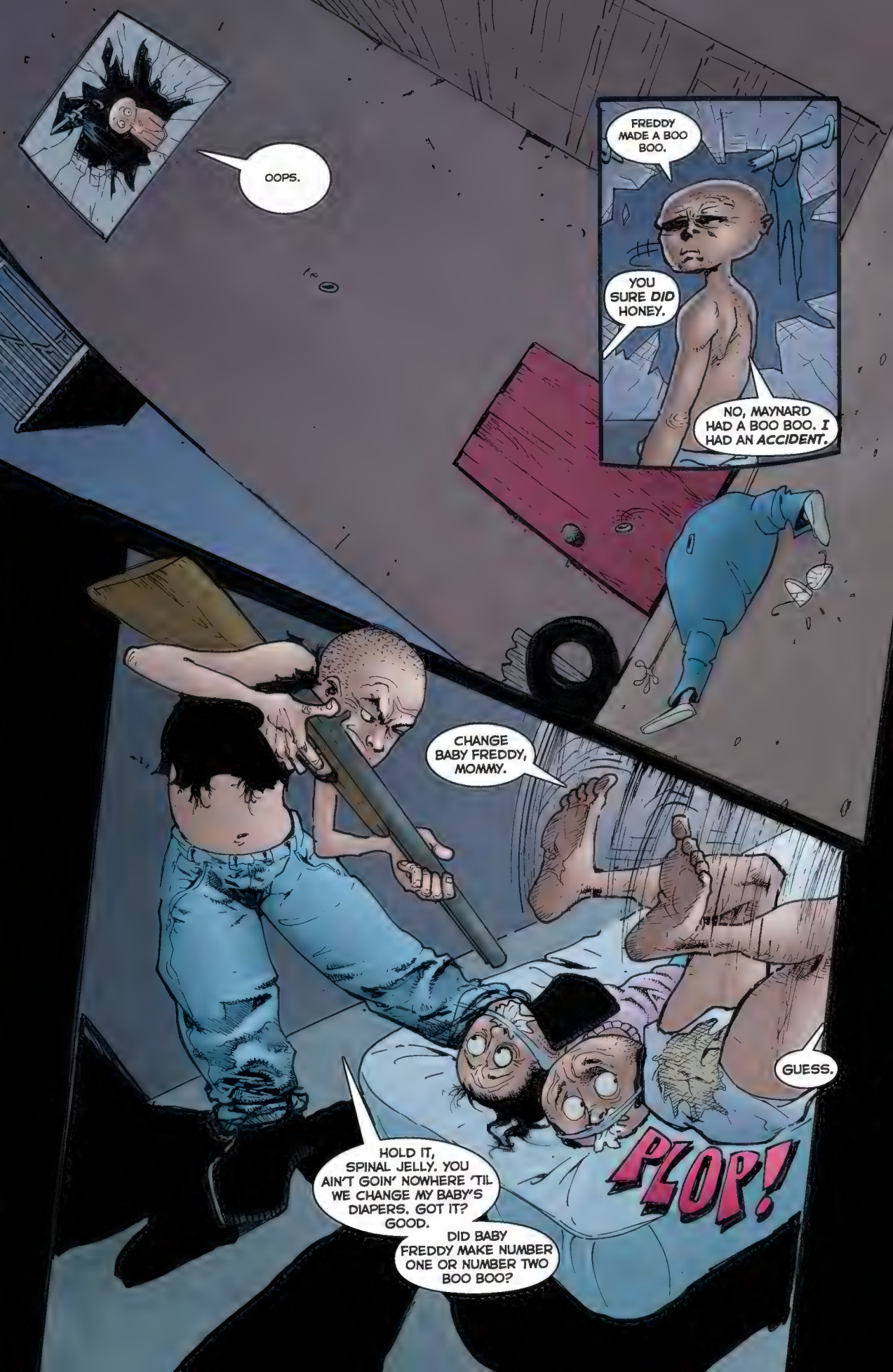
I GOT LOVE FOR THESE TWO, TRIX. THEY'RE GOIN' THROUGH SOME HEAVY SH*T, AND UNCLE FREDDY KNOWS ABOUT SH*T.
I'M THE FILTERING SYSTEM OF GOD. PURE INTELLIGENCE. JEEPERS- THE ABORIGINES KNOW THERE'S NUTRITION IN YER SH*T! IT'S GOT EVERYTHING YOU NEED!
LITTLE DOODY, I'M YER SHADOW, JUST AS TRIXIE HERE IS MICKEYS. EAT US, OR YOU'LL DROWN IN YER OWN FEEDBACK!
NOW LET'S HAVE SOME BEER!
MAYNARD, HOLD BLANCO UP SO HE CAN SEE BETTER.
SCREW YOU.
:BLUB:
:BLUB:
AND NOW ITEM #236-428. STAINLESS STEEL CUTLERY. I KNOW I'M EXCITED.


DUDE, YOU OVERSEXED CREEP- GET YOUR ELBOW OUTTA MY RIBS! YOU'RE KILLIN' ME HERE!!
WELL IF SOMEBODY WASN'T SUCH A FRIGID BITCH...
WITH WHAT YOU GIVE ME TO WORK WITH-
OK, FINE! YOU WANT DIRTY LAUNDRY? HOW 'BOUT THAT PARTY TEN YEARS AGO?!?
UH... EXCUSE ME?
YOU WOULDN'T DARE.
CRUNCH
WE HAVE TWO NAUGHTY CHILDREN HERE. AND IF THEY DON'T STOP BEING BAD LITTLE BOYS AND GIRLS...
... SOMEBODY'S GONNA GET SPANKED!
MAYBE ME!
IN YOUR DREAMS.
CUT 'EM FREE, TRIX. LET'S TEACH LITTLE MIC-MIC AND MR. DOODY A LESSON!

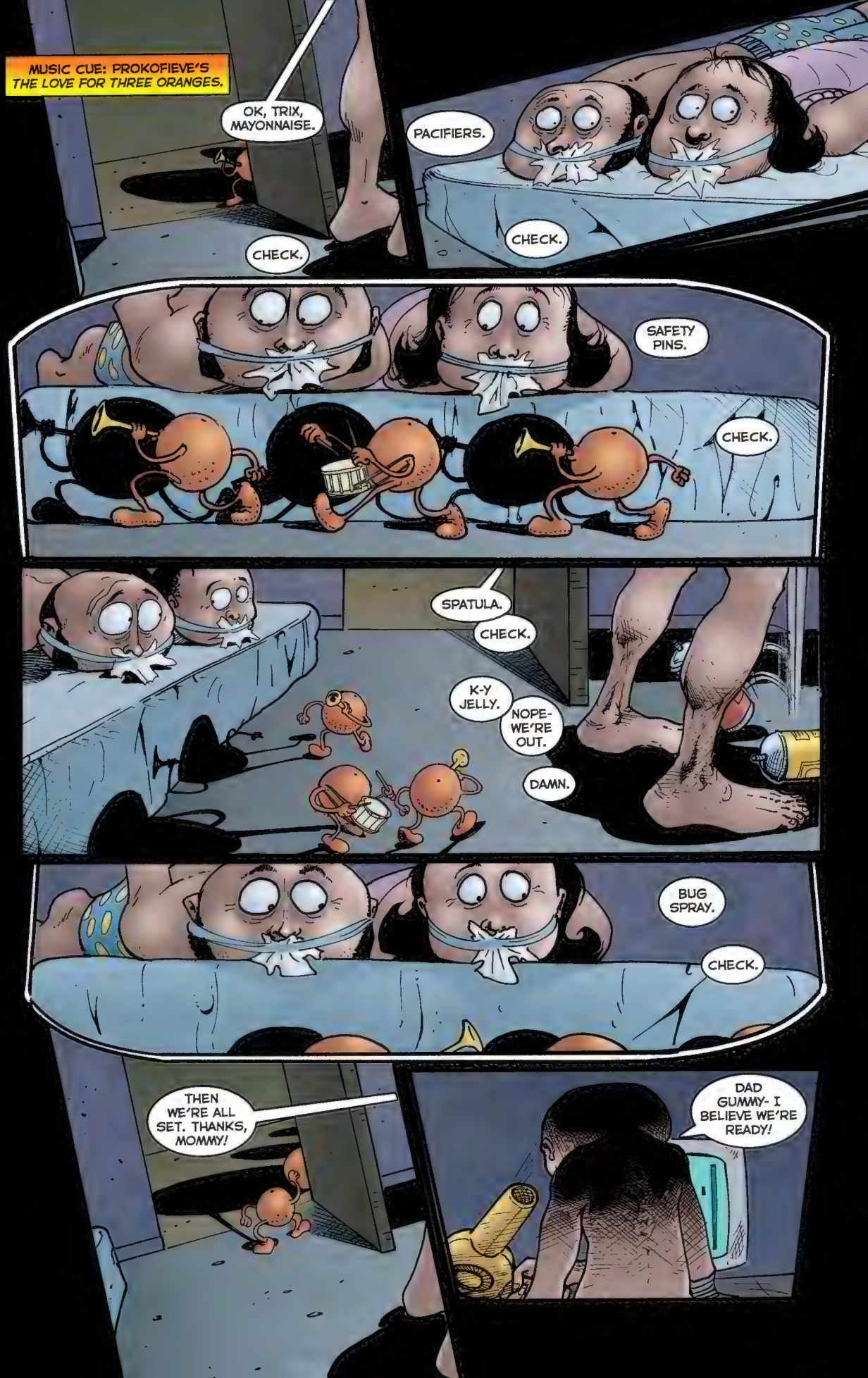

WOOO- WHAT WAS THAT ALL ABOUT?
THAT MUST HAVE BEEN SOME PARTY, EH, FRED?
I WANT DETAILS, SPILL IT.
NOT TALKIN'? OK, YOU LITTLE BRATS...
... DUCT TAPE IT IS!
OOOO- DUCKY TAPE! DUCKY TAPE!
LITTLE MICKEY-POO AND DOODIE-POO LIKE KEEPING SECRETS.
WAIT. WHAT WE'RE DOING, THIS...
... ISN'T RIGHT.
BLANCO.
WHEELBARROW! WHEELBARROW! WHEELBARROW!
WOOOOOSSSH!
DON'T WORRY, LI'L PAL. OUR SPECIAL TIME HAS COME.

IT'S TIME TO PLAY
WHEELBARROW
DOES MY WIDDLE BLANCO WIKE PLAYING "WHEELBARROW"?
HE DOES, HE DOES, HE DOES!
WHEELBARROW ME, UNCA FREDDY, WHEELBARROW ME!
SQUEEK SQUEEK SQUEEK
ME N' BLANCO'S HAVIN' A PRIVATE MOMENT, MAYNARD. GO PLAY PONG.
C'MON, PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE...
PLEASE.
PLEASE.
PLEASE.
PLEASE.
PLEASE.
PLEASE.
ZIP
PLEASE.
PLEASE.
PLEASE.
IN TEN THOUSAND YEARS, YOU WILL SHOVEL YER OWN SH☒T AND EAT IT, 'CAUSE YER ON RE-FEED!!!
OK, MAYNARD, IF THAT'S WHAT YOU WANT...
BOUNCE
BOUNCE
BOUNCE
WHEELBARROW! WHEELBARROW! WHEELBARROW!

YOU KNOW WHAT YOU ARE... BIG POTTY! 'CAUSE A BEAR'S CATHOLIC! THAT'S CHAPTER ONE, YOU S.O.B.!
WHEELBARROW!
WHEELBARROW!
WHEELBARROW!
WHEELBARROW!
WHEELBARROW!
WHEELBARROW!
WHEELBARROW!
WHEELBARROW!
WHEELBARROW!
WHEELBARROW!
YOU BRAINWASHED YOURSELF, YOU STUPID C@%KSUCKER!
I MADE *YOU* UP, YOU DIDN'T MAKE *ME* UP. YOU GOT IT BACKWARDS!
YOU KNOW WHAT YOU ARE?
WHEELBARROW!
WHEELBARROW!
YER F%#KN' ***SEMANTIC BLOCKAGE!!!***
SEE? *YOU* DON'T EAT YER ***FEEDBACK!***
WHEELBARROW!
CRASH
WHEELB-


OOPS.
FREDDY MADE A BOO BOO.
YOU SURE *DID* HONEY.
NO, MAYNARD HAD A BOO BOO. *I* HAD AN *ACCIDENT*.
CHANGE BABY FREDDY, MOMMY.
GUESS.
PLOP!
HOLD IT, SPINAL JELLY. YOU AIN'T GOIN' NOWHERE 'TIL WE CHANGE MY BABY'S DIAPERS. GOT IT? GOOD.
DID BABY FREDDY MAKE NUMBER ONE OR NUMBER TWO BOO BOO?

I KNOW WHAT YOU TWO MUST BE THINKIN'... OL' UNCLE FREDDY'S GOT SOME PROBLEMS. HE NEEDS *HELP.*
AN' YER *RIGHT!* YOU KNOW HOW LONG IT TAKES TO FIND A GIRLFRIEND WHO'LL CHANGE YER DIAPERS?
THEY DON'T GROW ON TREES.
RIGHT, BLANCO?
BUT LET'S GET BACK TO YOU TWO.
WHAT HAPPENED AT THAT MYSTERIOUS PARTY THAT YOU TWO KEPT BURIED FOR TEN YEARS?
SOME DARK PERVERTED SECRET? OR MAYBE SOMETHING HOLY... ONLY FREDDY'S LOVE CAN SAVE YOU NOW.
WE'LL DRAG IT OUT EVEN IF IT *KILLS* YOU! EVERYTHING MUST COME UP! EVERYTHING!!! OOOOHH, LOOK AT THEIR FACES, MOMMY. IT *MUST* BE GOOD.
THERE YOU GO, HON- HOW'S THAT?
THE MOST MOVING EXPERIENCE OF MY LIFE.
YOU ALWAYS SAY THAT.
IT ALWAYS IS.
OK. KIDS. HOLD TIGHT WHILE FREDDY GETS ON SOME WARPAINT.


MUSIC CUE: PROKOFIEVE'S THE LOVE FOR THREE ORANGES.
OK, TRIX, MAYONNAISE.
CHECK.
PACIFIERS.
CHECK.
SAFETY PINS.
CHECK.
SPATULA.
CHECK.
K-Y JELLY.
NOPE- WE'RE OUT.
DAMN.
BUG SPRAY.
CHECK.
THEN WE'RE ALL SET. THANKS, MOMMY!
DAD GUMMY- I BELIEVE WE'RE READY!

TRIXIE, MY FACE IS DRY!
LET'S BREAK OUT THE OUTFITS. WE'VE GOT A MARRIAGE TO SAVE.

FROM THE PUBLISHER'S DESK

Ted Adams here. I'm going to be your monthly guide through the IDW/Top Shelf checklist, pointing out our big hits and bringing your attention to some gems that you might otherwise miss.

Chris Ryall's dream has come true: IDW is publishing ***Rom***. IDW and Hasbro have been working together on comics for more than a decade and I don't think a week's gone by when Chris hasn't been trying to find a way for us to publish *Rom*.

His dreams came true when we launched *Rom* as part of this year's Free Comic Book Day event and continue in July with the release of the first issue. Chris is joined on writing duties by **Christos Gage** and long-time IDW artist, **David Messina**, is handling the art. The heavy-hitters providing covers for the first issue include **J.H. Williams III**, **P. Craig Russell**, **Michael Golden**, **Sal Buscema**, **Zach Howard**, and **Tom Whalen**.

July is also ***Rom* cover month** at IDW and you'll find him featured on ***Action Man*** #2, ***Back to the Future*** #10, ***G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero*** #230, ***Jem and the Holograms*** #17, ***Judge Dredd*** #8, ***Micronauts*** #4, ***My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*** #44, ***My Little Pony: Friends Forever*** #30, ***Star Trek*** #59, ***Transformers*** #55, ***Transformers: More Than Meets the Eye*** #55, and ***Transformers: Till All Are One*** #2.

The **Powerpuff Girls** are back in a big way at Cartoon Network with an all-new 40-episode series that premiered in April. We've got a new series, ***Powerpuff Girls*** #1, that takes place directly in the world of the new show with stories written by show writers **Jake Goldman** and **Haley Mancini** and drawn by **Derek Charm**. Ask your retailer about the extra-rare variant cover by **Jay Hasrajani**, one of the show's animators.

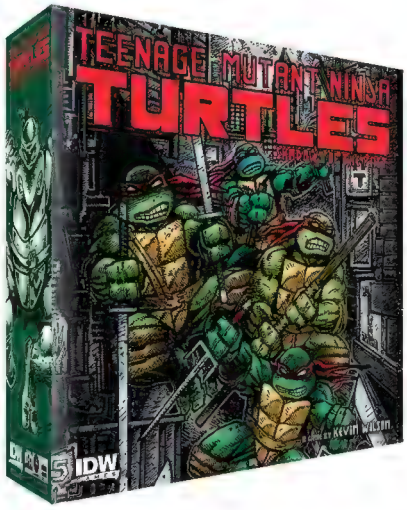
A hidden gem from IDW this month is ***Angora Napkin: Cuddle Core Collected Edition***. A 320-page collection of **Troy Little**'s cult-classic, Eisner-Nominated series that includes a DVD with the animated TV show that brings the characters to life.

Mickey Mouse Shorts: Season One #1 is based on the Disney TV animation by **Paul Rudish.** In the first issue, Mickey battles his way through a Tokyo bullet train during rush hour, an unlikely character competes in a dog show, and Donald suffers from… Flipperboobootosis?! This one also has a rare variant cover drawn by one of the shows animators, **Tara Billinger**.

EuroComics brings us one of my favorite titles, ***Alack Sinner***, by **Carlos Sampayo** and **Jose Muñoz**. This is the first of two volumes that will collect, for the first-time in English, all of the Alack Sinner comics by this legendary Argentinian team. Sinner is a hard-boiled private detective whose adventures are played out to a jazz soundtrack in a noir New York from 1975 through the 2000s. This one gets my highest recommendation.

Another one of my favorites is **Bill Sienkiewicz's *The New Mutants: Marvel Artist Select Series***. The title is a mouthful but this is the latest in the line of hardcover books we're doing with Marvel. Every copy is signed by Sienkiewicz, comes in a slipcover and is strictly limited to 999 copies. If you've read my other columns, you know that one of my sweet spots for comics is Marvel in the '70s and '80s and there's not much I like more than the issue collected here (***New Mutants*** #'s 18 to 31, as well as, a bonus story by **Chris Claremont** and **Sienkiewicz**).

While we're talking about Marvel, this month's Artist's Edition is ***Marvel Covers: The Modern Era***. There are two covers to choose from—a Spidey cover by **Todd McFarlane** and a Wolvie cover by **Sam Kieth**. Inside the book you'll find covers by Art Adams, J. Scott Campbell, Jim Lee, Sam Kieth, Todd McFarlane, John Romita, Jr., Joe Quesada, Marc Silvestri, and more.



IDW Games has ***Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Shadows of the Past***, designed by **Kevin Wilson**. This is a miniatures combat, scenario-driven campaign game that features story content from the IDW *TMNT* comic. Every game comes with more than 40 sculpted minis, 12 unique maps and over 100 cards featuring all-new art by **Tony Vargas**.

Wow, what a month. I can't wait for July to get here. See you in 30…

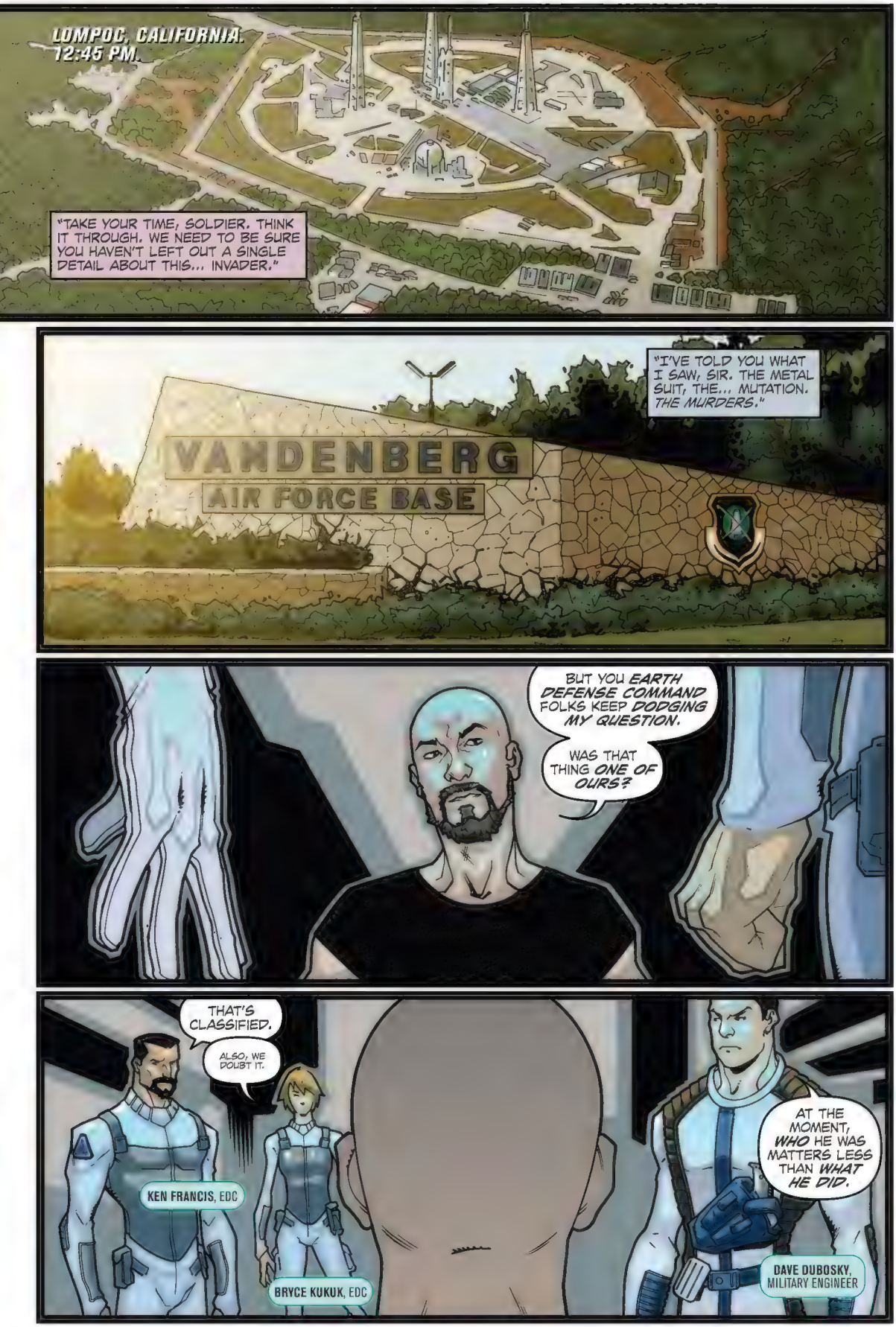
DARWYN COOKE

Brilliant storyteller,
cherished husband, loyal friend.
Taken from us too soon.

Rest in peace, Dar.

FREE DIGITAL ASHCAN

CHECK OUT A SNEAK PEEK OF THE AWESOME NEW SERIES...

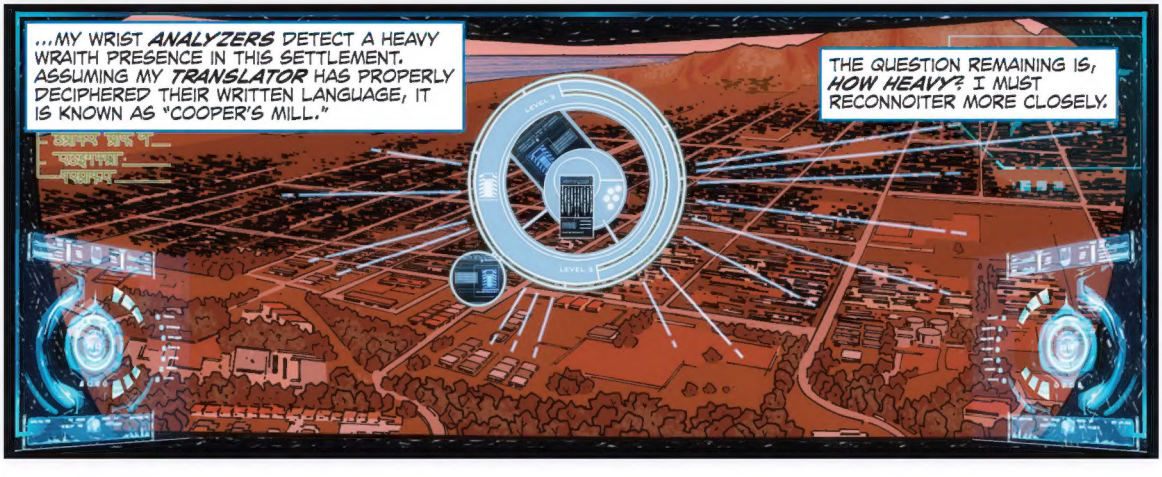

LOMPOC, CALIFORNIA.
12:45 PM.
"TAKE YOUR TIME, SOLDIER. THINK IT THROUGH. WE NEED TO BE SURE YOU HAVEN'T LEFT OUT A SINGLE DETAIL ABOUT THIS... INVADER."
"I'VE TOLD YOU WHAT I SAW, SIR. THE METAL SUIT, THE... MUTATION. THE MURDERS."
VANDENBERG
AIR FORCE BASE
BUT YOU EARTH DEFENSE COMMAND FOLKS KEEP DODGING MY QUESTION.
WAS THAT THING ONE OF OURS?
THAT'S CLASSIFIED.
ALSO, WE DOUBT IT.
KEN FRANCIS, EDC
BRYCE KUKUK, EDC
AT THE MOMENT, WHO HE WAS MATTERS LESS THAN WHAT HE DID.
DAVE DUBOSKY, MILITARY ENGINEER

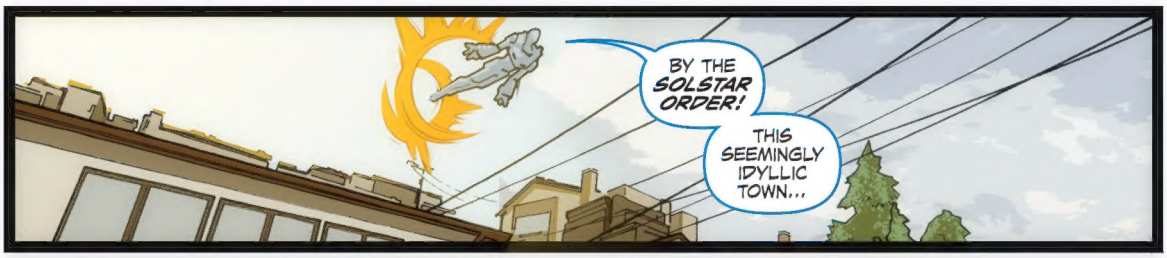
YEAH. HE KILLED THEM. MY WHOLE SQUAD.
HE ALSO SAID THEY WEREN'T HUMAN.
WHICH YOU CLAIM WAS PROVEN WHEN ONE OF YOUR TEAM, WHAT, TURNED INTO SOME KIND OF MONSTER?
MORE THAN THAT, SIR. HE... SUCKED ONE OF THE LOCAL COPS DRY.
USED HIM LIKE... LIKE FUEL OR SOMETHING.
GIANT ROBOTS IN DISTANT LANDS, THAT'S ONE THING. BUT A NEW PLAYER, KILLING TROOPS ON AMERICAN SOIL...
GO TELL THE BRASS. WE'LL FINISH HERE.
THE METAL GUY SAID THEY WERE ALL ALIENS, DISGUISED AS US. IS THAT KIND OF INFILTRATION EVEN POSSIBLE?
ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE.
SHLIK
POSSIBLE. AND IN SOME CASES, HUMAN—
SHLIK
"—INEVITABLE."
YEEAAARGH!

ROM IN EARTHFALL

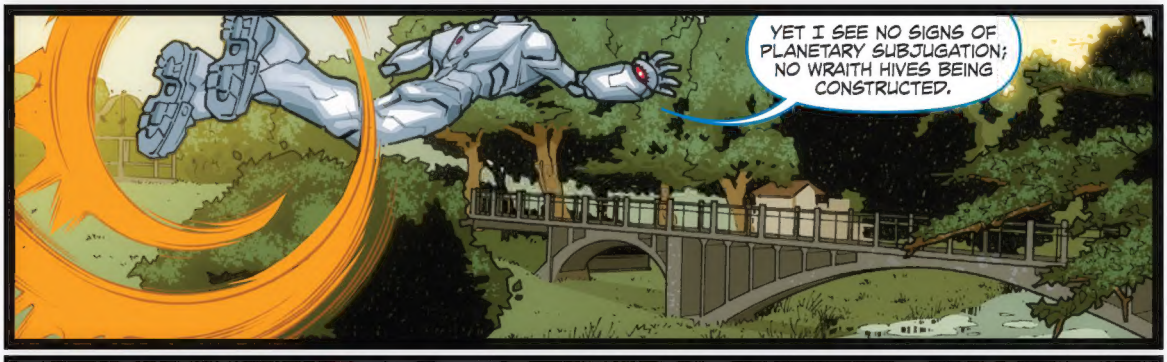
PART ONE

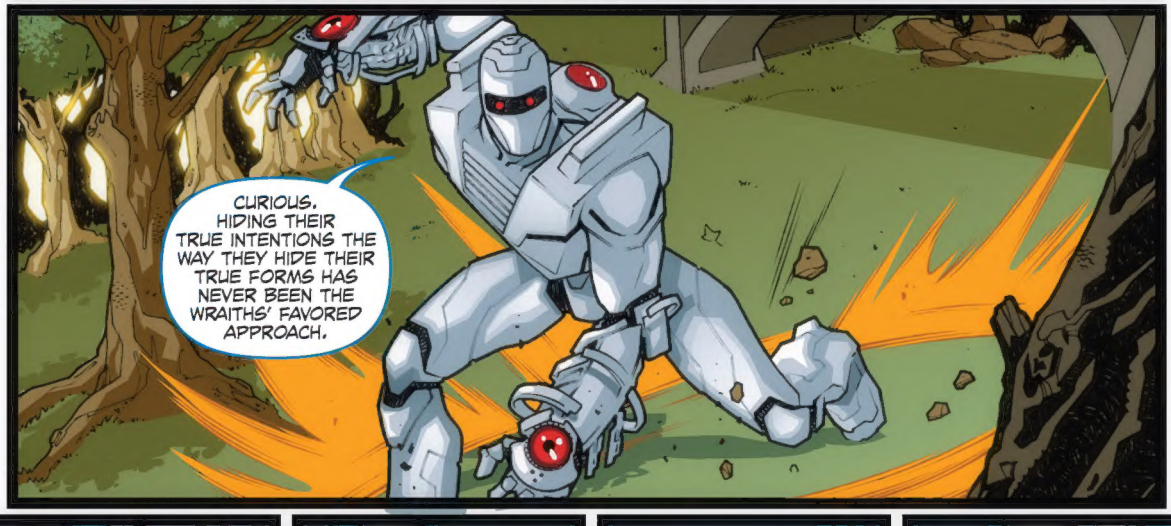
THIS PLANET FEELS DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHERS. THE NATIVE POPULACE OCCUPIES TOO MUCH OF THE LAND MASSES.
SO MANY PLACES FOR THE *DIRE WRAITHS* TO HIDE.
MY ARRIVAL WENT POORLY... NOT FOR THE FIRST TIME. ESTABLISHING INITIAL CONTACT WITH A WORLD'S MILITARY CAN LEAD TO HOSTILITIES UNDER THE BEST CIRCUMSTANCES ...AND THIS ONE'S BEEN *INFILTRATED*.
BETTER I ENGAGE A DIFFERENT CLASS OF HUMAN TO HELP GUIDE ME. AN ELDER... PERHAPS THE LOCAL EQUIVALENT OF A SPIRIT-GUIDE, IF THEY HAVE THEM. BUT FIRST...

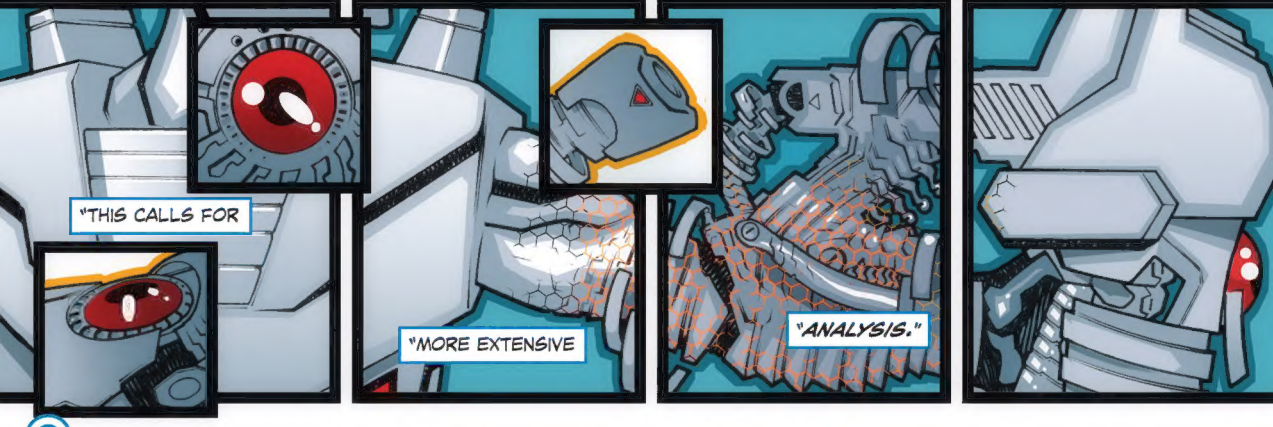

...MY WRIST *ANALYZERS* DETECT A HEAVY WRAITH PRESENCE IN THIS SETTLEMENT. ASSUMING MY *TRANSLATOR* HAS PROPERLY DECIPHERED THEIR WRITTEN LANGUAGE, IT IS KNOWN AS "COOPER'S MILL."
THE QUESTION REMAINING IS, *HOW HEAVY?* I MUST RECONNOITER MORE CLOSELY.


BY THE SOLSTAR ORDER!
THIS SEEMINGLY IDYLLIC TOWN...

"...APPEARS AT FIRST GLANCE TO BE OVERRUN BY DIRE WRAITHS."


YET I SEE NO SIGNS OF PLANETARY SUBJUGATION; NO WRAITH HIVES BEING CONSTRUCTED.


CURIOUS. HIDING THEIR TRUE INTENTIONS THE WAY THEY HIDE THEIR TRUE FORMS HAS NEVER BEEN THE WRAITHS' FAVORED APPROACH.


"THIS CALLS FOR
"MORE EXTENSIVE
"ANALYSIS."

MANTLO PARK.
1:45 P.M.
IT'S SO GOOD TO HAVE YOU HOME, HONEY.
WE KNOW IT HASN'T BEEN EASY...
SO YOU BROUGHT ME HERE FOR, WHAT, AN INTERVENTION?
WE'RE JUST WORRIED ABOUT YOU, DARBY.
THE MILITARY DOES OFFER... HELP, DON'T THEY?
THEY OFFER A LOT OF THINGS. WHAT THEY DON'T OFFER IS A PROMOTION IF YOU GET A REP FOR BEING "FRAGILE."
I'M NOT CRAZY, ENRIQUE. I JUST NEED SOME DOWNTIME. A CHANCE TO BE NORMAL FOR A WHILE.
HE KNOWS THAT, SWEETIE. WE'RE JUST—WE'VE ALL BEEN SO WORRIED. WE CAN SEE THE CHANGE IN YOU.
IT'S HARD TO KNOW WHAT TO SAY.
SAYING NOTHING'S OKAY, TOO, MOM. QUIET IS... A NICE CHANGE.
I'M HAPPY TO JUST BE HOME AND HAVE A CHANCE TO REDISCOVER WHO I AM.
AND WHO YOU'VE ALL BECOME WHILE I WAS OVERSEAS, TOO.
OH, WE'RE THE SAME AS ALWAYS.